

DIWAN
SANKARA VARIYAR
OF
COCHIN.



C. ACHYUTA MENON.

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OF
COCHIN.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



BY
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TO
THE MEMORY
OF
My guide, philosopher and friend,
Y. K. RAMAN MENON,
To whose inspiration this little book
mainly owes its being.

There is a collaboration loftier and more real than that of
the pen. It is the collaboration of thought and example.

MAETERLINCK

PREFACE.

The materials for the following sketch were gathered mainly from the records of the Cochin Secretariat: no important private papers of Sankara Variyar's are known to be now in existence. This sketch is therefore more a historical retrospect than a personal biography. The Secretariat records were examined by me some years ago for the preparation of the *Cochin State Manual*: to supplement the notes then taken, I examined the records again recently with the kind permission of His Highness's Government, for granting which my cordial acknowledgements are due to them.

As this book covers the same ground as some portions of the *Manual*, I have taken the liberty of borrowing several paragraphs from the latter without any material alterations. These borrowings the reader will probably be disposed to excuse on the Greek principle referred to by Lord Morley that "a man may say a thing once as he would have it said, he may not say it twice."

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PREFACE

The Life of Sankara Variyar's son and successor, T. Sankunni Menon, for which fuller materials are available, is nearly ready for the press, and I expect to bring it out in a few weeks.

TRICHUR,
1st January 1923.

C. A. M.



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*Note:—*I have taken the liberty of altering the orthography of proper names, and have generally followed the system adopted by the Government of India for the *Imperial Gazetteer*.

DIWAN SANKARA VARIYAR

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

A class of native statesmen is raised up who have a better chance of showing originality of talent and force of character than they could possibly have in territories administered directly by the British Government. Thus the ruling race acquires a far better idea than they could otherwise have had regarding the development of which the native ability is susceptible and the part which the natives can fill when thrown on their own resources. Many native statesmen have been produced of whom the Indian nation may justly be proud.—SIR RICHARD TEMPLE.

But search the land of living men

Where wilt thou find their like agen?—SCOTT.

If Cochin enjoys the reputation of being one of the best governed Feudatory States in India, she owes it primarily to Edakunni Sankara Variyar and his son Thottekát Sankunni Menon, who held the Diwanship of the State from 1840 to 1856, and 1860 to 1879 respect-

tively. The foundation of the modern administration of the State was laid and its basement built by the former, while its superstructure was raised by the latter. The work of their successors, who were most of them worthy men, was more or less of the nature of plastering, painting and decorating and of executing annual repairs. The father was a man of the type of Sir Salar Jung and Sir Dinkar Rau as an administrator, while the son was the compeer of his contemporaries and friends, Sir Madhava Rau and Sir Seshayya Sastri. Both received in their time unstinted praise for their magnificent work from the Government of Madras, the Board of Directors and the Secretary of State, and the heartfelt gratitude, respect and admiration of his country-men. Their reputation was not so wide or so great as it deserved to be, which was due mainly to the modesty and self-effacement of their character and the limited field in which they worked and achieved their success. It is, however, the bare truth that, in point of character, ability and achievement, they compare favourably with

the most distinguished and successful Indian administrators of the nineteenth century.

The administration of Native States during the first half of the nineteenth century acquired an unenviable notoriety: corruption, oppression and confusion were rampant everywhere. "To whatever region of India we look," says Sir William Hunter, "whether in the south, or in the centre, or in the north, the great Native States were fallen before the end of the first half of this century into a depth of misery and misrule that imperatively demanded the intervention of the suzerain power." To take the case only of the States in southern India: Haiderabad was overrun by Arab mercenaries, and had no government worth the name. The financial embarrassment of the State rendered it unable to meet its obligations to the British Government, with the result that a considerable portion of the Nizam's Dominions was practically annexed by the latter in 1853. The rest of the State escaped annexation by the fortunate appointment of Salar Jung as the Prime Minister and by the outbreak of the

Indian Mutiny. The ruinous misgovernment of Mysore obliged the Paramount Power to depose the Maharaja and assume the administration in 1831. The affairs of Travancore were so grossly mis-managed that, in the words of the late Maharaja of that state, "if Lord Dalhousie had continued a year more in India, if the great events of 1857 had not occurred and absorbed public attention, and if Krishna Rau's administration had been prolonged, Travancore would long ago have been one of the richest Collectorates in Southern India." The financial administration of Pudukota had been so ruinous for several years that the Raja was reduced to live on promissory notes. The British government was seriously thinking of turning the State into a Zemindari, and actually withheld the usual salute and the title of Highness from the Raja. The only silver lining in this dark cloud at this period was Diwan Sankara Variyar's administration of Cochin. While the Court of Directors, the provincial governments and their political agents were incessantly administering advice,

admonition and threat to the rulers of other Native States, they had nothing but praise for the “able”, “vigilant”, “judicious” and “successful” administration of Cochin by its “upright”, “zealous” and “meritorious” Diwan Sankara Variyar. At a time when an empty treasury, general impoverishment and popular discontent were the prominent features of the generality of Native States, Cochin alone could boast of an over-flowing exchequer and a prosperous and contented people. This happy state of things was mainly brought about by the long administration of Diwan Sankara Variyar.

Sankara Variyar's beneficent work was continued for a still longer period by his son Sankunni Menon not only with equal success and efficiency but also more in consonance with modern ideas of good government. The father shunted the car of Cochin administration on to the right line, and the son urged it on and gave it such a momentum that it has progressed ever since with more or less steadiness and

rapidity. Sankunni Menon thoroughly reorganised all branches of administration, especially the administration of justice, and effected great improvements in them steadily and systematically. He did not do it "by sweeping away all old institutions and customs, tearing up tradition by the roots and leaving a bleeding and irritating surface to receive the application of new ideas : but he worked on the old basis, and repaired the old structure." He had his reward in the respect and gratitude of the people for whom he laboured and in the approval and honours which he received from the Paramount Power.

Sankara Variyar was a self-made man. If he had received a fairly good education according to the ideas of his time, it was due mainly to his own exertions. Unlike Sir Salar Jung and Sir Dinkar Rau, who were scions of distinguished aristocratic families and had hereditary claims to high official preferment, Sankara Variyar had none of the advantages of birth and influential family connections. It

was by dint of his natural intelligence, force of character, energy and integrity that he forged ahead of his contemporaries and rose from a petty clerkship to the Diwanship of Cochin when he was only forty-two years of age, and, notwithstanding the fact that he had for nearly half his term of office to contend against the active opposition of his master, he achieved such conspicuous success as a progressive administrator. The great reputation which Salar Jung and Dinkar Rao acquired was due as much—if not more—to the signal service rendered by them to the British Government during the crisis of the Indian Mutiny, as to the improvements effected by them in the administration of their respective States, while Sankara Variyar's fame rests entirely on the service rendered by him to his own State. Salar Jung's name is mainly for this very reason well known throughout India, while Sankara Variyar's reputation is hardly more than local. And yet a cursory study of the conditions prevailing in the two States at the time of the death of these ministers will satisfy any intelli-

gent reader that the Haiderabad of Salar Jung was to the Cochin of Sankara Variyar what the England of the Stuarts was to the England of Queen Victoria.

Sankunni Menon inherited the intellect and character of his father; he had also the advantage of having been brought up by the latter. It has been said of James Mill that his greatest contribution to human progress was his son, whom he educated to be his fellow-worker and successor. A similar remark may be made about Sankara Variyar's services to Cochin and his upbringing of his two sons, both of whom rose to the Diwanship of the State. Sankunni Menon was given a good English education, and, as he was a passionate lover of books all his life, he became a man of wide culture and varied information. He was also a vigorous writer, a resourceful administrator and an accomplished gentleman. During the major portion of his Diwanship Sir T. Madhava Rau was the Diwan of the sister State of Travancore. They had a great regard and respect for each other, and they may be

said to have worked hand in hand for the advancement of the States committed to their respective charge. "These two States" Sankunni Menon once wrote to his friend, "may move hand in hand in this matter as they have done in many others." In the complimentary notices of their administration by the British Government their names were generally coupled together. In 1868, for instance, the Secretary of State for India, Lord Salisbury, who was not given to indiscriminate praise, said in a despatch to the Government of India that, "if all Native States were governed as was Travancore by Madhava Rau and Cochin by Sankunni Menon, the British Government would have to look for their laurels." The right note about Sankunni Menon was struck by one of the Residents of his time, Mr. J. I. Minchin, in a communication to the Madras Government in 1871. "Having been upwards of a year in these States," he said, "I think it right on this occasion to record emphatically the high opinion which I entertain of Sankunni Menon's honourable character and administra-

tive ability. His name has not been brought so prominently to public notice, but Cochin owes as much to this officer as Travancore to Sir T. Madhava Rau."

It may be a platitude to say—but it will bear repetition—that, in judging of the men and measures of previous generations, we should not rigidly apply the standards of our own. We must bestow their mead of praise on those who rose in any degree above the common level of contemporaries and predecessors, and not blame them for not coming up to the standard of their successors. If our own standard is high, it is due in a much larger measure to their work than our own. If we have been able to plant the flag on a high tower, we must remember that they have made it possible for us to do so by carrying the ramparts. To assume superior airs, therefore, when we speak of our predecessors is to imitate the boy spoken of by Macaulay, who, mounted on the shoulders of his father, cried out, "How much taller I am than papa!"

CHAPTER II.

BIOGRAPHICAL.

Divinely gifted man,
Whose life in low estate began,
* * *
Who makes by force his merits known,
And lives to clutch his golden keys,
To mould a mighty State's decrees,
And shape the whisper of the throne.—TENNYSON.

Sankara Variyar was born on the 22nd January 1798 in Edakunni, a village situated four miles to the south of Trichur and near the Ollur Station on the Cochin State Railway. He belonged to the Variyar section of the *Ambalavasi*, or temple-servant, caste. Nothing is now known of his parents except that they were in straitened circumstances and that they eked out their livelihood by the exercise of their hereditary occupation. He was the eldest of seven children, two boys and five girls. Like other *Ambalavasi* boys, young Sankaran went through the ordinary pyal school course, and then studied Sanskrit under one Sūlapāni Variyar, a scholar of some repute in his day,

and attained considerable proficiency in that language. Many stories are told of his struggles in those days to keep the wolf from his door, how he was helped by this man and harshly treated by the other, and how in his prosperous days he returned the kindness of the one and refrained from showing unkindness to the other, and so on. Most of these stories are probably apocryphal.

Young Sankaran was anxious to get a footing in Government service. He seems to have felt that nature intended him for better work than making garlands and cleaning lamps in an obscure village temple. His teacher Sūlapāni Variyar introduced him to Kōrapat Sankara Menon, the Zillah Judge of Ernakulam, who happened to be an old pupil of his, and at the latter's suggestion, the boy went to Ernakulam in his eighteenth year to seek his fortune. After suffering many disappointments and rebuffs of fortune for more than a year, he was appointed to a petty clerkship in the Appeal Court on a monthly pay of four *fanams* (one rupee, two annas and four pies),

the purchasing power of which then was equal to that of six rupees in these days. In 1918 Nanjappayya was appointed the first Diwan of Cochin, and on the re-organisation of the Huzur Office by him, Sankara Variyar was given a place in it on a slightly better pay.

Here his bright intelligence, capacity for work and business-like habits soon attracted the notice of Nanjappayya, a shrewd and capable officer with considerable experience in the Company's service. He was not only an English-knowing man, but a good Sanskrit scholar and the author of a philosophical treatise in that language*. Sankara Variyar's knowledge of Sanskrit was therefore an additional recommendation in his favour, and he soon became the favourite and confidential clerk of the Diwan, and accompanied him everywhere. He

* This was a period of considerable religious ferment in Cochin. Twelve years before Nanjappayya's appointment, the members of the royal family adopted Madhvaism, to the great indignation of the Nambùri Brahmins, who were all Smarthas, and wielded great influence in the State. Nanjappayya's treatise was entitled *Trimatasàrasangraha*, or a manual of the essentials of three religions. He also translated it into Malayalam. No copy of the work, either in Sanskrit or in Malayalam, appears to be in existence now.

was rapidly advanced in the service, and, when only twenty-four years of age, he was promoted to the office of Head *Rayasam* (head of the correspondence department) in the Diwan's Office, which was then a position of trust and responsibility. He held this office for eleven years, during which, acting under the advice of his chief, he devoted his leisure hours to the study of English under a Eurasian clerk who was then in charge of the Diwan's English correspondence. He acquired a fair knowledge of that language, and was eventually able to speak and write it with some facility. I have come across letters and memoranda of his unaided composition in English: they are couched in fairly good language, though not altogether free from errors of grammar and idiom.

Sankara Variyar's rapid advancement in the service gave genuine pleasure to his friends, whose name was legion, but, at the same time, it did not fail to give rise to jealousies, especially among some of his fellow clerks. At the instigation, it is said, of one of the latter, a

party presented a petition to the Diwan in 1822, containing a charge of bribery against Sankara Variyar. Nanjappayya, knowing the man as he did, treated the charge with contempt, but Sankara Variyar insisted upon a searching enquiry. He was accordingly committed to Court to be dealt with according to law, as was the practice at the time. After proper judicial enquiry, he was honourably acquitted by the Court.

Some time before his appointment as Head Rayásam, Sankara Variyar married a Nayar lady named Kunjipilla Amma of the Thottèkàt family in Ernakulam, an ordinary middle class family, which subsequently came into prominence in consequence of this alliance. He had two sons by her, Sankunni Menon and Govinda Menon, both of whom rose to their father's position in after years. Kunjipilla Amma was a modest, simple and well behaved lady without any noteworthy accomplishments. She died in October 1840 when she was only thirty-five years old, but she lived long enough to see her husband's success and her sons' promise. Three

years later, Sankara Variyar married Kunji Amma of the well known Kurupat family of Trichur. She was a widow with a son and a daughter, and, unlike her predecessor, she was a woman of strong character and a domineering will. This daughter was married to Sankara Variyar's eldest son in 1845.

Najappayya died in April 1825 : his loss was keenly felt by Sankara Variyar. The latter evidently had great respect and admiration for his chief, for in his subsequent correspondence as Diwan we often find Najappayya quoted as his authority and his actions referred to with commendation. Nanjappayya was succeeded in the Diwanship by the Diwan Peishkar, Séshagiri Rau. The latter was a man of very mediocre abilities and attainments, but thoroughly honest and well-intentioned. Sankara Variyar had great respect for him as a man, and rendered him loyal and efficient service.* On the removal of Séshagiri

* Séshagiri Rau received no pension on his retirement, and died without making any provision for his family. For many years, his children received a pension from Sankara Variyar's private purse.

Rau from office in April 1830 as the result of court intrigue, Edamana Sankara Menon succeeded him, and soon made himself notorious by his corruption and peculation. Not long after his appointment, a wide spread agitation began to be carried on by the people for his removal, but the confidence and support extended to him by the Resident Colonel Cadogan enabled him for nearly five years to pursue his career of self-aggrandisement, and enrich himself, his relatives and his dependants at the expense of the Sirkar and the people. But the agitation against him became so intense that the Government of Madras recalled the Colonel, and sent a capable civilian, Mr. J. A. Casamajor, as the Resident in June 1834. Not long after his arrival in Cochin, Sankara Menon was placed under suspension, and, after an exhaustive enquiry, he was brought to trial before a special commission, convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for five years and confiscation of all his property. During the major portion of this black quinquennium, Sankara Variyar remained a helpless looker-on,

and effaced himself as much as possible to escape the taint.

The advent of Casamajor was the turning point in Sankara Variyar's career. At this time he was the Huzur Sheristadar, to which office he was promoted a few months previously. Casamajor was a man of great ability and administrative capacity and was the first civilian to hold the office of British Resident in Travancore and Cochin. He wanted by him an intelligent, experienced and English-knowing man to consult on matters relating to Travancore and Cochin, and, after making enquiries in both the States, selected Sankara Variyar for the purpose. He was accordingly drafted to the Resident's office, though he remained nominally Huzur Sheristadar and subsequently Diwan Peishkar, to which office he was promoted in 1836 on the appointment of Venkatasubbayya as acting Diwan in succession to Sankara Menon. In this capacity Sankara Variyar served for six years under three Residents, all of whom entertained a high opinion of his ability and integrity, and marked him out for

the Diwanship at the next vacancy. For we find Casamajor's successor Major General Fraser writing thus to the Diwan soon after Sankara Variyar was confirmed as Diwan Peishkar at the end of 1836—"It is most gratifying to me to be able to express the high opinion I entertain of his ability and intelligence, which are eminently useful to myself as well as the Sirkar, and promise to render him at all times a most useful and valuable servant of the State." Sankara Variyar's helpful advice was not confined to matters relating to the administration of Cochin, but it extended equally to that of Travancore. Both General Fraser and his successor Captain Douglas have borne testimony to the value of his services to the latter State.

Sankara Variyar had a great regard for the new Diwan Venkatasubbayya, and his relations with him were most cordial and friendly. Venkatasubbayya's administration was a great improvement upon that of his immediate predecessors, but Sankara Variyar was not satisfied that all that should or could

be done was being attempted for its improvement. He used accordingly to prepare and submit to the Diwan through the Resident various memoranda containing suggestions for public improvements, such as the construction of roads, bridges, canals and irrigation works, and for improving the administration generally. The Resident forwarded them to the Diwan with an expression of his warm approval of the suggestions, but Venkatasubbayya, while admitting the desirability of their early execution, pleaded

That eternal want of pence
Which vexes public men.

These improvements had therefore to wait till the author of the suggestions was placed in a position to give effect to them.

An incident occurred at this time, which showed how much Sankara Variyar was in advance of the times. The standard of official morality was very low in those days; bribery and peculation were all but universal. All grades of officials, including judges and

magistrates, regarded petitioners and litigants as lawyers now look upon clients, as a source of legitimate emolument, and the diversion of public money to their private coffers on its way to or from the treasury was as fashionable among the official classes as the smuggling of dutiable articles was among the upper classes in England. When Sankara Variyar was Huzur Sheristadar attached to the Resident's Office, the Christian Judge of the Zillah Court of Trichur, a native of Kunnankulam, requested him to use his influence with the Resident and the Diwan to procure him an increase of pay, and offered him a handsome remuneration for his good offices. Sankara Variyar promptly placed the letter before the Resident, who immediately recommended the dismissal and prosecution of the judge, but he was only dismissed, as the Raja was averse to taking the hitherto unheard-of step of prosecuting a man for offering bribes. The Resident, however, insisted upon a circular being sent to all heads of departments and offices, narrating the incident. This may appear a small matter to people

living in these days, but it must be remembered that this was the very first shot fired in the crusade against official corruption in Cochin.

Venkatasubbayya enjoyed the confidence and support of the Raja by whom he was appointed Diwan, but his Highness's death which took place in 1838, interrupted the happy relations between the Raja and the Diwan. His successor, Raja Rama Varma, who had before his accession to the *masnad* cordially liked Venkatasubbayya, now began to hate him as cordially owing to a difference of opinion in regard to the provision to be made for the maintenance of the late Raja's consort and family. Both the Resident and the Madras Government upheld the Diwan's view, and the Raja had consequently to give way. But this made the Diwan personally obnoxious to His Highness, who on this ground pressed for the removal of the Diwan from office. After a protracted correspondence, the Madras Government, after signifying their wish that the Cochin State should not be deprived of the valuable services of Venkatasubbayya, finally

agreed to his removal, *provided the Diwan Peishkar Sankara Variyar was appointed to succeed him as Diwan.*

His Highness readily agreed to this condition, but an unexpected circumstance, which showed the mettle of Sankara Variyar, stood in the way of effect being given to the decision of the Madras Government. To use the words of Captain Douglas, who succeeded General Fraser as Resident in 1838, "in accordance with the decision contained in the first paragraph of the extract (from the Minutes of Consulation of the Government of Madras) and with His Highness's wishes, the situation of the Diwan was offered by me to the present Diwan Peishkar Sankara Variyar, who, however, being aware that the principal cause of His Highness's displeasure to his present Diwan was that he recommended a certain amount as provision for the Netyar Amma (consort) of the late Raja, which amount of provision was approved by the Resident Major General Fraser and the acting Resident Captain Douglas, as also finally by the Govern-

ment, the whole of which proceeding he, the Diwan Peishkar, was cognisant of and consulted on, that the same reason of displeasure which appeared to His Highness to exist towards the present Diwan must be equally applicable to himself, and that he would therefore, if the Resident approve of it, desire to decline undertaking the duties of the office with this difficulty to contend against. I have altogether recognised and approved of the justness of these objections, and it will not therefore be possible to give present effect to His Highness's wishes for the removal of the present Diwan." This difficulty was finally got over, however, by His Highness positively assuring Sankara Variyar that his displeasure did not extend to him and that he had full confidence in the latter. Venkatasubbayya accordingly delivered charge of the office of Diwan to Sankara Variyar on the 20th January 1840, two days before he completed the forty-second year of his age.

CHAPTER III.

ADMINISTRATION.

I beg to offer you my respectful thanks for the favourable opinion which you have been pleased to express of my qualifications and fitness for the important office to which I have been appointed, for which the only and the best return I can make is to endeavour to deserve it. The interests of the State shall engage my constant and unremitting attention, and my best energies shall be exerted to maintain the honour and respectability of the government and to promote the welfare and happiness of the people.—SANKARA VARIYAR. *

So much one man can do

That does both act and know.—ANDREW MARVEL.

Sankara Variyar's administration marks a new era in the history of Cochin. It was he that laid the foundation of what may be called its modern administration, and it was in his time that Cochin for the first time received recognition as a well governed State. From the records of his time and from the accounts of his contemporaries Sankara Variyar appears to have been a man of dauntless courage, sturdy independence, boundless energy and untiring

* Extract from Sankara Variyar's letter to the Resident on assuming charge of the Diwanship.

industry, and his long administration of seventeen years was crowded with solid achievements in all departments. A detailed account of his work is likely to prove wearisome to the general reader: only its general features and the more important of his administrative acts will be dealt with here. While every detail of the administration received his personal attention, his energy was mainly devoted to the larger and more important functions of government—the proper regulation of finance, the execution of useful public works, the expansion of trade and agriculture, and the suppression of grave crimes. Throughout his administration he enjoyed two advantages: he was well served by his subordinates, and he was cordially supported by the British Resident. His subordinates of all grades, to whom he was always discriminatingly considerate, caught something of his energy and enthusiasm, and served him with a loyalty and zeal never known to his predecessors. Within six months of Sankara Variyar's appointment, Colonel Maclean, who succeeded Captain Douglas in the Residency in 1838,

died, and was succeeded by Major General W. Cullen, who was as distinguished as a scientific observer as he was as a soldier and administrator, and who served as Resident in Travancore and Cochin for a period of twenty years. Throughout Sankara Variyar's administration, the General gave all the advice, encouragement and support to one whom he described as "the present most excellent Diwan of Cochin, by far the most independent, upright, zealous and successful minister that the Sirkar have ever possessed."

The improvement of the financial condition of the State first engaged the attention of the new Diwan. That condition had always been more or less unsatisfactory: the State had for a long time been leading a hand-to-mouth existence. The receipts of each month were generally expended before its close, and there was hardly any money in the treasury at any time. The Sirkar officers were paid only at long and irregular intervals, and that too only partly in money, the rest being in the monopoly articles of tobacco, salt and pepper, while the

subsidy to the British Government was always in a chronic state of arrears. The finances reached their lowest ebb during the administration of Sankara Menon, but matters improved considerably in the time of Venkatasubbayya. It was the latter's boast that in his time no officer's salary was ever more than two or three months in arrears. Under such circumstances, public improvements requiring any large outlay of money were obviously impossible, and naturally therefore Sankara Variyar earnestly devoted his attention and energy to placing the finances of the State on a satisfactory footing. He had already been aware that their unsatisfactory condition was not due so much to the inadequacy of the receipts to meet all normal charges as to the collection of revenue being lax and the expenditure being unregulated; and accordingly he took effective measures to ensure promptitude in the collection of revenue and the adjustment of accounts, and to prevent wasteful expenditure and the leakage of government money. He gave helpful instructions and guidance to

all his officers, and at the same time watched their work with unceasing vigilance, and they in their turn soon began to entertain such a devoted attachment to, and such a wholesome fear of, their chief that they carried out his instructions with promptitude and efficiency. The success of his measures was such that, within a few months of his taking charge, the subsidy kists and the salaries of the officers began to be paid wholly in money and as regularly as they are in our own times, and though he began his administration with only Rs. 371 in the treasury, his second financial year closed with a balance of nearly a lakh and a half of rupees, of which a lakh was at once invested in Company's securities. The successful management of the finances thus commenced was continued uninterruptedly throughout his administration, so that at the time of Sankara Variyar's death there was a balance of two lakhs of rupees in the treasury and nine lakhs in Company's securities. This success was not achieved by the imposition of any new or additional tax or by stinting expenditure on

public improvements; on the other hand, he signalised almost every year of his administration as much by large outlays on public works and other improvements as by the abolition of some vexatious impost or other.

The importance of public works as a factor in the development of the country was not properly realised by any of Sankara Variyar's predecessors. Before his time public works meant merely the construction of pagodas, palaces and public offices, and a few *chiras* or embankments for the protection of agriculture. There was then no carriage road in any part of the State; from want of suitable bridges and culverts and causeways across paddy flats and embankments across lakes, wheeled traffic was impossible and unknown, and goods were transported on the heads or backs of men and on pack bullocks. But the first six or seven years of Sankara Variyar's administration effected a complete transformation in this respect. By vigorously pursuing a carefully laid out programme of road construction, he covered the country with a net-work of roads with massive

and substantial bridges and culverts. Almost all the trunk roads and several of the branch roads in the State (about sixty per cent. of the now existing length), all the great bridges except the one at Shoranur, and all the travellers' bungalows except those at Ernakulam and Nemmara were constructed during this period. Over twenty small *Chatrams* were built in suitable places for the convenience of travellers, but these gradually came to be occupied solely by *Bairagis* or religious mendicants. Sankara Variyar was as keen on the planting of avenue trees as he was on the making of roads. The planting of such trees kept pace with, and in some cases even preceded, the construction of roads. All the old avenue trees now in existence in the State are among those planted in his time.

To realise fully the magnitude of this achievement one must bear in mind the difficulties of road construction on the west coast, with its hills and dales, its lakes and paddy fields, and its abundant rain-fall, as also the extremely limited resources of the State and

the shortness of the period during which all these works were executed. To minimise the cost as much as possible, convict labour was freely used for the construction of roads: the supply of convicts happened to be abundant owing to the vigour with which highway robbers and *dakait*s were pursued at this period. All these roads were aligned with considerable judgment, as was evidenced by the fact that professional men did not subsequently find it necessary to modify their alignment to any appreciable extent, but in point of drainage and metalling, there was considerable room for improvement. The following extract from a letter written by the Resident Mr. F. N. Maltby five years after Sankara Variyar's death bears positive as well as negative testimony to the excellence of his work in this connection.—“ These roads were originally built so completely that on the cross road from Kunnankulam to Vadakancheri I counted in one causeway eight well built stone-arched bridges.....But these fine works have been of late years greatly neglected. The causeways have sunk in many places several feet, they have been narrowed by the washing

away of material and the encroachment of the plough till in some places they are hardly passable."

One fortunate circumstance in this connection was that Sankara Variyar's administration synchronised with that of Mr. Conolly in Malabar, where that period was marked by great road-making activity. When a road was constructed in Cochin or Malabar up to the frontier, the work was readily taken up by the other party concerned, and the road was continued up to some trunk road. Wheeled traffic was thus established between Coimbatore and Trichur for the first time in 1844. When one fine morning twelve bullock carts laden with goods from Coimbatore arrived at Trichur, where most people had not seen such a conveyance before, there was by all accounts more excitement in the place than when the railway train first passed through it fifty-eight years later.

The improvement of water communication also engaged Sankara Variyar's attention during this period. The southern Taluks of the

State were admirably served by back-waters and rivers, which afforded an easy and cheap means of conveying the produce of the interior to the port of Cochin. There was, however, considerable room for improvement in these water-ways, and Sankara Variyar had many of such improvements carried out early in his administration. By the construction of the Aranattukara canal, and the deepening of the Edatturutti canal, boat traffic was for the first time rendered possible between Eranakulam and Trichur throughout the year, and by the construction of the Tevara-Kundannur canal the distance by water between Ernakulam and Tripunittura was reduced by more than one-half. The other improvements were of a minor nature. All these works, while in progress, were constantly inspected by the Diwan, and may in fact be said to have been carried out under his personal supervision.

When most of these works were completed, Sankara Variyar turned his attention to projects of irrigation with a view to bring under cultivation extensive tracts of land which were

then lying waste. A large number of *Chiras*, more than one-half of those now in existence, were constructed about this time either for the storage of water or for the prevention of the ingress of salt water, and these *Chiras* have been the means of bringing thousands of acres of waste land under cultivation. His most important irrigation project was that of the Chittur Taluk. While camping in that Taluk in 1849, General Cullen found by his barometrical observations that the river there had a fall of about 200 feet between the eastern and western frontiers and that it formed therefore an excellent basis for irrigation operations. On his suggestion, Sankara Variyar took up the project with characteristic vigour, and had an anicut soon constructed at Mùlattara, with the necessary canals for distribution of water. Nearly two thousand acres of land were immediately brought under cultivation and assessed to revenue in 1854. The system originally designed was subsequently found to be faulty, and the work had to be re-done partially or wholly more than once. The works were greatly

extended in subsequent years, so that the area now served by them is nearly twenty thousand acres. It may be mentioned here that during the closing years of his administration Sankara Variyar had substantial revetments and bathing ghats constructed for most of the large public tanks in Trichur, Tripunittura, Chittur and other places.

Though all the above works were carried out by the revenue officers under the Diwan's supervision, Sankara Variyar took care to fortify himself by professional advice. An Eurasian Surveyor with British experience, one Mr. Armstrong,* and after him a Surveyor named Anderson, prepared most of the plans and estimates, and the more important among them were scrutinised by the Executive Engineer of Malabar. The Surveyor periodically inspected the works and sent up progress reports with suggestions, and through the good offices of the Collector of Malabar, the Diwan got the Executive Engineer to inspect the more

* "In every respect a valuable public servant," says Sankunni Menon.

important works in progress. The latter officer more than once complimented the Cochin officers on the efficient and, more especially, the economical manner in which they carried out the works. The Karuvannur bridge, for instance, one of the most important works carried out in Sankara Variyar's time, was constructed at a cost of Rs. 14,600, and is now as good as new after the lapse of three quarters of a century.

Sankara Variyar's predecessor was an enthusiast in the matter of agricultural improvements. He opened experimental gardens in Ernakulam, Trichur and Chittur, where cotton, indigo, coffee, sugar-cane and potato were cultivated, and he distributed large quantities of cotton seeds and coffee plants annually among the ryots for experimental cultivation, but these endeavours do not appear to have borne any appreciable fruit. Sankara Variyar had not much faith in these schemes: he appears to have looked upon them as the fads of a theorist. He turned his attention to the more practical scheme

of extending agriculture by bringing waste lands under cultivation and of removing burdens which pressed heavily on the land. We have seen what means he employed to achieve the former object. It is not possible to say exactly what extent of land was brought under cultivation by his irrigation projects: it must have considerably exceeded thirty thousand acres, or about fifteen per cent of the lands now under wet cultivation. In some villages the assessment pressed so heavily on the land that there was hardly any margin left for the cultivator; Sankara Variyar sanctioned the remission of a portion of the assessment in all such cases. In a larger number of villages a second crop assessment called *kālānikuti* was levied, though at the settlement made by Diwan Najapayya the fact of their being double crop lands was taken into consideration in assessing the tax. The whole of this assessment, together with some minor imposts, thirty-three in number, was remitted in 1847. The necessity and equitableness of these measures were made unmis-

takeably manifest when the lands were scientifically surveyed and systematically assessed at the general settlement carried out at the beginning of the present century.

When the question of the abolition of *kālānikuti* was under discussion, the matter came to the notice of the Madras Government, when they enquired if the lowering of the selling price of tobacco, which was then a Government monopoly, would not be more beneficial to the people. Sankara Variyar replied, "I fully concur with His Lordship in Council that a remission in the selling price of Coimbatore tobacco would confer a very great benefit on the population generally, but at the same time I lean to the opinion that the abolition of the *kālānikuti* is a subject, of all others, the most deserving of the early consideration of the Government in as much as it is an impost on a portion only of the community, and is unjust from the very fact of its being partial in its operation. The abolition of this tax would be merely an act of justice, but a remission in the selling price of Coimbatore tobacco

must be viewed as an indulgence and a desire on the part of the Sirkar to contribute to the comforts of its subjects.....I have not offered these observations from an unwillingness to reduce in a degree the selling price of tobacco, but merely to place in contrast the relative importance of the two measures. There is, however, no obstacle whatever to the carrying out of both these measures." And he did carry them out.

For the expansion of trade and commerce, Sankara Variyar did wonders not only by extending and improving the means of communication but also by freeing them from many irksome burdens. Before his time inland trade was throttled at every step by the levy of transit duties at a large number of stations, and one of his first acts was the abolition of these duties, which he did "from a conviction of the injury and detriment arising from it to all classes of people and from a knowledge of the unjustifiable exactions and extortions incidental to it." He reduced the inland customs at the frontier stations on all goods more than once

in his time, and in the case of rice and other food-stuffs he abolished the duties altogether. The monopoly price of tobacco was reduced twice during his time, while the repeated suggestions of the Collector of Malabar to raise the selling price of salt in Cochin to that obtaining in his District were invariably met by a prompt refusal. "When the Honourable the Court of Directors and the Madras Government," Sankara Variyar told the Resident, "are repeatedly urging on this Sirkar the importance of pursuing as liberal a policy as possible towards its subjects by the removal of taxes that press heavily on them, it is utterly out of the question to think of adding to their burdens by assimilating the price of salt in Cochin to that which obtains in the Company's country, as suggested by Messrs Conolly and Robinson." The reduction in the price of tobacco resulted only in a large increase in consumption and a consequent augmentation of revenue from this source, but when this monopoly was abolished in Malabar and South Canara in 1853, Cochin suffered a serious loss

in its tobacco revenue, which fell suddenly from 2.25 to .83 lakhs of rupees. Even this did not deter the Diwan from continuing in the beneficent course of renouncing taxes burdensome to commerce.

Soon after Sankara Variyar became Diwan, he constituted Malipuram a port, and placed it under a Master Attendant. The whole foreign trade of the State passed through the port of British Cochin, but the State did not participate in the customs duties derived from it. Sankara Variyar was therefore anxious that Cochin should have a port of its own and that its revenues should derive some benefit from it. Malipuram was, however, an open roadstead, and could not compete with Cochin, but during the monsoon months the shipping from Cochin has to take refuge in the smooth water anchorage there, the well known mud bank of Narakal. The bottom of this anchorage consists of the very finest mud, greenish black in colour and very unctuous to the touch, and during the monsoon this mud rises from the bottom of the sea, becomes dispersed in the water, and effect-

ally stills the surf. Ships can then ride safely in these roads, and load and discharge cargo in clear water on the open coast all through the south-west monsoon season. By opening this port, therefore, and rendering the necessary facilities for loading and unloading cargo, a considerable portion of the foreign trade was diverted to Malipuram for a few months in the year, which made a substantial addition to the customs revenue of the State.

Sankara Variyar left the judicial department untouched during his administration, but as the chief lieutenant of the Diwan and the chief adviser of the Resident, he had a prominent part in the great reforms which were carried out in his predecessor's time, and which modernised the judicial administration of the State. In 1836 four elaborate Regulations were passed with a view to bring the administration of justice into line with that of the Company's territories. The first of these Regulations was for extending the jurisdiction of the Courts; and it also enacted more elaborate provisions relating to the procedure of the

Civil Courts than those contained in the existing *Hukm-nàmás*. The second was for the guidance of the Appeal Court, while by the third the Tahsildars of the several Taluks were also appointed police officers, and the ultimate supervision over magisterial and police duties was vested in the Diwan. The fourth Regulation constituted the Zilla Courts the Criminal Courts of the respective Zillas, and appointed the judges of the Appeal Court circuit judges for the disposal of sessions cases. These Regulations contained several provisions of a miscellaneous nature, such as those relating to the scale of court fees, limitation of suits, protection of Sirkar monopolies, cattle trespass, weights and measures, etc. Two years later, another Regulation was passed, by which a stamp duty was for the first time imposed on documents evidencing sale, mortgage &c. These Regulations formed the groundwork of all judicial legislation in Cochin.

Sankara Variyar does not seem to have considered any further changes necessary in the

constitution or procedure of the department* but as the Chief Magistrate of the State he carried out his duties with a vigour all his own. There was considerable lawlessness in the State about this time. Highway robbery, *dakaiti* and smuggling by armed hands were not of infrequent occurrence, and there was not an adequate police force to cope with them. Two years before his appointment as Diwan, Sankara Variyar wrote—"The police establishment of the country had been considerably reduced in 1834 on account of the low state of the treasury at the time, in consequence of which the present number of peons and daffadars are scarcely sufficient to discharge the duties of their respective offices. This inconvenience is deeply felt by the inhabitants of the interior parts of the country as well as travellers, who are suffering considerable annoyance from

* Soon after his appointment as Resident, General Cullen usurped the control and supervision of the judicial department. Sankara Variyar quietly acquiesced in this usurpation, as he seems to have considered it desirable that the Raja's interference in the administration of justice should be minimised as much as possible. This could be done only if the control of the judiciary remained in the hands of a strong Resident.

robbers and other turbulent characters. To afford some remedy for the evil complained of, it would be advisable, if practicable, to appoint an extra police with instructions to travel about those parts of the country where such occurrences are likely to take place in order to apprehend the offenders in conjunction with the police authorities of the respective districts.”* Soon after he became Diwan, he carried out these suggestions, and pursued the desperate characters with characteristic vigour, himself leading the men at times. In the course of a few years, he was able to ensure security of life and property to an extent altogether unknown to previous generations.

Among other important measures of Sankara Variyar may be mentioned the establishment at Ernakulam of an English school in 1845 and a hospital in 1848, institutions which have since developed respectively into the splendid College and General Hospital of our time. In the English school, especially, Sankara Variyar

* The above extract is interesting as an example of Sankara ariyar's own composition.

took great interest; he inspected it occasionally and invariably took part in conducting the annual examinations. The hospital was placed under the general supervision of the Civil Surgeon of (British) Cochin, who was *ex-officio* the Darbar Physician of the State. In 1846 the services of an European tutor, Mr. Robert White, were entertained for the English education of the princes, and during the forty years he held this appointment, several princes attained considerable proficiency in English.]



CHAPTER IV.

APPRECIATION.

None knew thee but to love thee
None named thee but to praise.

Sankara Variyar's successful administration of the State did not fail to receive from the Government of Madras the appreciation and praise which it deserved. When the Resident sent up with his remarks the financial statement of Cochin for the year 1841—2, the Government perceived the first signs of improvement manifesting themselves, and they expressed their "great satisfaction at the prosperous condition of the Cochin Provinces, which reflected great credit on the Diwan of the State." In 1843, they went further. "The increasing prosperity of the Cochin Sirkar is highly gratifying to the Most Noble the Governor in Council, and reflects great credit on all concerned in its management. His Lordship in Council is glad to observe that the successful administration of the Diwan continues to

be marked not only by efficiency and prudence, but also by a judicious liberality which cannot fail of the happiest results....The greatest attention is paid to the improvement of the internal communications and to the general prosperity of the country." "The attention bestowed on the improvement of the roads and other public works," the Government remarked in 1844, "reflects great credit on the Diwan, and His Lordship in Council is gratified in again having the opportunity of recording the high opinion he entertains of the conduct of this functionary." In 1845, they remarked, "It is gratifying for His Lordship in Council to observe that, through the judicious administration of the Diwan, the Cochin Sirkar continues prosperous, and that improvement in every department, where necessary, are carried out consistently with a due regard to the interests of the Raja." "The Governor in Council remarks with satisfaction," said the Government in 1846, "on the very prosperous state of the finances of the Cochin Sirkar, attributable to the able management of the Diwan

under the judicious guidance of the Resident.” In 1847, His Lordship in Council recorded “his sense of the judgment and ability displayed by the Diwan in the management of the affairs of the Sirkar,” and congratulated the Resident “on having the efficient and willing co-operation of so enlightened a Diwan.”

The pæan of praise thus rose in crescendo year by year till it reached its climax in 1848. The Government concluded the Minutes of Consultation in that year as follows:—“The merits of the present Diwan of Cochin have been so frequently before Government that His Lordship in Council can only reiterate the high opinion he entertains of that zealous and successful minister, and is glad to learn that one of his sons has by his own merits obtained employment in the public service, in which he cannot fail to rise, if he pursues the same upright course of conduct which has distinguished his father.” Similar appreciative remarks continued to be made by the Madras Government throughout Sankara Variyar’s administration, but I refrain from making further

quotations lest their monotony may prove wearisome to the reader.

The Court of Directors were equally cordial in their appreciation of the good work done by Sankara Variyar. In their general letter to the Government of Madras, dated 28th June 1843, they remarked—"Major General Cullen's report, after a tour in the Cochin territory, on the prosperity and good government which pervade that State under the present Diwan Sankara Variyar is the more gratifying from the contrast it affords with former mismanagement, and we are glad to learn that a sum of Rs. 105,000 has been saved from the revenue, and has, at the suggestion of the Diwan, been invested in Company's securities." In July 1844, they said—"The administration of this State by the present Diwan Sankara Variyar continues to be highly successful. The sum of two lakhs of rupees has been saved and invested in Company's securities, while the same success and efficiency that has marked his administration of the finances has been exhibited in every other branch of the Government, whether

revenue, police or judicial. Great activity is displayed in the construction of roads and other useful public works, and much liberality is shown in the renunciation of taxes burdensome to commerce. You very properly instructed Major General Cullen to make known to the Diwan the favourable sentiments of Government. Such conduct as his deserves all the encouragement which can be given to it by a marked expression of your approval." "We learn with great satisfaction," said the Directors in May 1845, "the continued financial prosperity of this small State and the continuance of economical administration, owing to which the Diwan expected to have shortly another lakh of rupees for investment in Company's securities, without neglecting useful public works, on which the expenditure appears to be liberal. The Diwan is entitled to much credit for his success in reducing the arrears in the Civil and Criminal Courts. In 1846 the Directors remarked—"The accounts of the Cochin Government afford additional evidence of the able and vigilant administration of the

Diwan Sankara Variyar.” I shall conclude with one more extract from the despatches of the Court of Directors. “The abolition of the tax called *Kálànikuti* (second crop assessment),” they said in 1848, “and the reduction of the monopoly price of tobacco have been agreed to by the Raja.....This, with the recent abolition of frontier duties, makes a relinquishment of revenue to the extent of Rs. 41,970 per annum, a relief for which the people are indebted to the successful financial administration of the Diwan Sankara Variyar.”

Apart from the great success of the vigorous and beneficent administration of Sankara Variyar, its contrast with the former mismanagement of the State has naturally influenced the Government of Madras and the Court of Directors in bestowing so much praise on him. Another and more important reason is indicated in Major General Cullen’s letter to the Raja dated 10th February 1848. “I think that the marked satisfaction of the Government at the prosperous state of your Highness’s finances and Government will be specially

gratifying to your Highness, *for it is almost the only instance of such successful management in any of the Native States that I know of.*"

I have already indicated in a previous chapter in what a chaotic and ruinous condition the governments of the other Native States were at this period. In the general letter of the 28th June 1843 above referred to, the Board of Directors say, immediately after their reference to Cochin—"The state of Travancore for some years has been far less satisfactory, the disbursements having every year largely exceeded the receipts. The lax, not to say corrupt, administration of the superannuated Diwan Subba Rau has also produced in many important respects a deterioration of government."

No other Indian administrator of this period appears to have received such high praise uninterruptedly for a long series of years from the local Government and the Court of Directors. Coming as it did from the highest representatives of the Paramount Power, it must naturally have immensely gratified its recipient,

and strengthened him in his beneficent work. But Sankara Variyar neither sought nor shunned praise: it came to him because it lay in the path of duty conscientiously and successfully performed. It was characteristic of Sankara Variyar that he never made a parade of the eulogistic remarks passed on him. They did not even see the light of publication, but lay mouldering amidst the musty records of the Cochin Secretariat, till they were partially unearthed by me twelve years ago. When some of these eulogistic remarks were first published, the people of Cochin were quite astonished at their nature. Not a single individual of the present generation had the least idea of the high encomiums that were lavished on Sankara Variyar by the representatives of the Supreme Government.

CHAPTER V.

RELATIONS WITH THE RAJA.

Everything on every side was full of traps and mines. It was in the midst of this chaos of plots and counter-plots that the firmness of that most noble person was put to the proof. He never stirred from his ground; no, not an inch.—BURKE.

Sankara Variyar enjoyed the uniform support and confidence of Raja Rama Varma. At first, His Highness was naturally somewhat frigid in his attitude towards a Diwan who, he felt, was thrust upon him, though, if the choice was left to him, it would have fallen on the same officer. But this frigidity thawed not long after Sankara Variyar's appointment, when His Highness began to perceive the great difference between his administration and that of his predecessors. To have, for instance, a comfortable balance in the treasury and in Company's securities was a delicious experience after generations of hand-to-mouth existence, and the Raja became extremely cordial towards the minister to whom he was indebted for it. But Sankara Variyar was not destined long to

enjoy the favour and regard of this considerate master, for His Highness died at Irinjalakuda in May 1844. This was a great blow to Sankara Variyar, and he felt it very keenly.

When this death was reported to them, the Court of Directors expressed the hope "that the death of the late Raja of Cochin and the succession of his nephew the Elaya Raja would not diminish the Diwan's influence or impede his beneficial measures." But this hope was not destined to be fulfilled. Before his accession to the *masnad*, His Highness appeared to be favourably disposed to the Diwan, and showed him great consideration and regard, but not long after that event, his attitude underwent a change. Misunderstandings arose between them at first over trifling matters, but they gradually grew in volume and intensity, and ended in open rupture. Whatever might have been the immediate causes of these misunderstandings, their primary cause was undoubtedly the enunciation of the extraordinary doctrine by the Court of Directors that the Raja had practically no authority over the

Diwan*. His Highness was an intelligent, high-spirited and self-willed prince, and keenly resented this pronouncement as an insult and humiliation to him. His ambiguous position naturally made him jealous and suspicious of the Diwan, and pre-disposed him to see an attitude of defiance lurking behind every word and deed of the latter. On the other hand, the Diwan was as high-spirited and more masterful ; and strong in the consciousness of the good work he was doing and in the assurance of the support of the British Government, he was little disposed to brook vexatious interference and opposition from a young and inexperienced chief. The gossip of the time assigned another

* When the Court of Directors were informed of the fact that the Madras Government acceded to the wishes of the late Raja for the removal of Venkatasubbayya from the office of Diwan, they wrote as follows:—"We regret to find that you have withdrawn your opposition to the wish of the Raja of Cochin for the dismissal of the Diwan Venkatasubbayya and that his services have consequently been dispensed with. The Raja's objection to that individual appears to have been groundless, and so long as the Resident is authorised actively to interfere in the administration of this State, it is of importance that the minister should be a person in whom he can confide, and should know himself not to be liable for removal while he performs his duty."

reason of a private and domestic nature for the bitter antagonism of His Highness, which, if true, did not reflect credit on Sankara Variyar.

Whatever might have been the causes of the misunderstanding, the result was the unedifying spectacle to which the country was treated of a prolonged quarrel between the Raja and his minister. His Highness wrote letter after letter to the Resident to convince him that the country was being ruined by the Diwan's mismanagement of its finances and his general mal-administration, but General Cullen's replies, in which he uncompromisingly championed the cause of the Diwan, only added fuel to the fire. The Raja then tried to bring about a deadlock in the administration by refusing to sanction the appointment of the Diwan's nominees to fill up vacancies in the State service and the expenditure of Sirkar money or any projects recommended by the Diwan. But the latter in all such cases made the necessary appointments and incurred the necessary expenditure with the approval of the

Resident and "pending His Highness's sanction"*, and the administration was carried on without a hitch. Upon this, His Highness began to flood the Secretariat of the Madras Government with letters containing fiery denunciation of the Diwan and the Resident. Sankara Variyar was "the most subtle and intriguing minister of any Sirkar"; his conduct was "disrespectful and audacious"; "he was guilty of insubordination and misconduct;" the Resident and the Diwan "were setting up a despotism supported by their own arbitrary doctrines"; they were "not only deviating from and infringing on the customs and laws of the land, but were superceding the legislature by fictitious contrivances of their own, which were operating as new 'laws'; their object was "neither the protection of personal liberty, the security of property, nor the peace of the public, but it was only the gratification

* This was done on the Resident's suggestion. "I would suggest your communicating my opinion to His Highness, and should His Highness by any accident forget to pass early orders on the subject, I would suggest your acting on my recommendation pending the receipt of more formal instructions".

of their mere will and pleasure and resentment." His Highness therefore requested the Government to "adopt measures to prevent them both from having access to his treasury, and cause them to account for vast sums they had expended without his sanction, to order the Resident not to shield the Travancore Sirkar in their schemes of gradual encroachments, nor to violate the orders of Government, nor to exercise his power beyond his just authority, and bring the Diwan to an open trial for his several culpable acts and high misdemeanours."

Several letters couched in similar language and containing similar sentiments were addressed by His Highness to the Madras Government, who, after a lengthy correspondence with the Resident on the subject, placed the whole case before the Court of Directors for orders in 1846. "We are much concerned to find," the Honourable Court replied, "that the Raja has conceived a strong aversion to the meritorious minister to whom the beneficial state of his finances is in a great measure to be attributed,

and demands his removal from office on charges, some of which are frivolous, and the remainder, as you, in concurrence with the Resident, believe altogether groundless. The question has therefore arisen whether you are bound to comply with the Raja's wish for the dismissal of a Diwan personally obnoxious to him, but in your opinion innocent of the charges alleged against him and highly qualified for the office." After discussing the terms of the subsidiary treaty, the Directors concluded as follows:— "Our opinion is that, under the ninth article of the treaty you are empowered to maintain in office a minister whom the Raja wishes to remove, if you have good reason to believe that the Raja's displeasure is occasioned, as you hold to be in this case, by the honest endeavours of the Diwan to perform his duty in conformity to the views of the British Government. It cannot be expected that any minister will do his duty faithfully, if his dismissal is the consequence of adherence to it, and therefore, unless Sankara Variyar is supported against the displeasure which he has incurred,

all hope of good Government for the Cochin territory must be abandoned. * * The Raja should therefore be informed that Sankara Variyar cannot be dismissed from office unless on substantial misconduct proved against him to your satisfaction."

After this decision and through the earnest intercession of the Resident, a peace was patched up between the Raja and the Diwan in 1847, and all concerned in the good government of the State congratulated themselves and each other on this happy event. The Resident reported to the Madras Government "the very gratifying results of the interviews that I had with His Highness in my last visit to Cochin and at which His Highness had desired your (the Dewan's) special attendance, when His Highness had been pleased to express in strong terms his sense of your zealous labours as Diwan." This report of the Resident "the Most Noble the Governor in Council perused with much satisfaction." The Court of Directors said—"These facts are creditable to the Diwan Sankara Variyar

between whom and the Raja we have much pleasure in learning that there is now a prospect of a better understanding than heretofore." But these felicitations unfortunately proved premature: His Highness's ill-feeling towards the Diwan was only scotched, but not killed. In a few months the old misunderstandings began to revive, and eventually became more accute and bitter than ever before. At this stage Sankara Variyar thought that it behoved him to retire from office and thereby put an end to an unpleasant and undesirable situation, but General Cullen obstinately refused to listen to any such proposal. He would, however, have raised no objection to Sankara Variyar's resignation, if the latter had agreed to accept the Diwanship of Travancore, which was offered to him about this time, apparently at the instance of the Madras Government. But Sankara Variyar respectfully but unhesitatingly declined this tempting offer. It is not known what official reason he gave for doing so, but I have heard from his son that in a personal interview with the Resident he

attributed his refusal to the facility with which Travancore was making and unmaking Diwans at this period and the ignominious treatment that was being meted out to those who went out of favour and office.*

By the beginning of 1848, His Highness's attacks on the Diwan and the Resident again became virulent and acrimonious. The Diwan was again, "that subtle and intriguing functionary, guilty of the grossest tergiversation and prevarication". "He wields his authority with all the insolence and caprice of office". "The Diwan through the cloak of office is still playing many fantastic tricks and contumaciously refuses to obey my orders." "The rights and immunities of my subjects depend upon the novelties and innovations such as you (the Resident) and the present Diwan jointly are illegally labouring to introduce, which seem to

* The circumstances that led to the offer of the Travancore Diwanship to Sankara Variyar are given in Nanu Pillai's unpublished fragment of the History of Travancore, quoted in the *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. III. p. 384. Nanu Pillai evidently did not know that the offer was actually made to Sankara Variyar.

be your ruling vices." "The present unconstitutional usurped tenure of the office of Diwan, backed as it has been by the Honourable the Court of Directors and the Bengal Government as well as the Madras authorities, is the cause of the present functionary misbehaving himself, * * and being thus backed by such extraordinary anomalous influence, to disobey the Raja seems to him to be of no consequence." His Highness had to send all such communications through the Diwan, who used strongly to reason and remonstrate with him at least to tone down the language of his communications to the Resident and the Government, but it was apparently of no avail. On one occasion he wrote thus to the Resident—"By His Highness's orders I have the honour to forward herewith another despatch to your address received from His Highness to-day. It is very objectionable in its tone and incorrect in its statements, but as it is made the vehicle of further charges against myself of mal-administration, I feel it would be indelicate in me not to send it on immediately, which I otherwise

would not have done without endeavouring previously to convince His Highness of the impropriety and uselessness of troubling the Resident with such communications." All the same, there was hardly a single week in which such a communication did not emanate from His Highness, and the Madras Government had to remonstrate with him on "the highly improper tone of his letters to the address of the Resident."

Amenities of this kind continued to be indulged in almost till the demise of the Raja, which took place in July 1851. When he realised that his end was near, His Highness sent for the Diwan, and became cordially reconciled to him. The Raja told Sankara Variyar that he always considered him the best man then available for the high office of Diwan, and that he fought for his removal on a question of principle, namely, the re-establishment of the Raja's right to appoint and dismiss his minister at his pleasure. During the first period of the controversy, His Highness always gave audience to the Diwan whenever he waited on him, and

patiently listened to his arguments, but almost invariably they agreed only to differ. Since 1850, however, the Raja declined all personal intercourse with the Diwan, and never gave audience to him till he was on his death bed*. The Diwan, however, always accompanied him in his tours, and never failed to administer to his comforts and convenience and to show that profound respect and loyalty for His Highness's person which he instinctively entertained for royalty. That His Highness was sincerely anxious for the good government of the country and that he also knew to a considerable extent what measures should be taken to achieve that end are abundantly clear from the very letters in which he denounced the Diwan and the Resident. His furious diatribes were interlarded with enunciations of many sound principles of government and many sensible suggestions for the improvement of the administration.

* During the time that the Raja's displeasure was thus markedly manifested, some over-zealous followers of his, deluded by false ideas, made more than one attempt on Sankara Variyar's life, but the latter miraculously escaped from both bullet and poison.

The Court of Directors noticed this more than once, and in their general letter of September 1850 they said—"We regret that the Raja continues to cherish an aversion to this useful public servant. It is however gratifying to find that the letters of complaint which he continues to address to the Resident and to you (which bear obvious marks of European origin)* contain strong expressions of a desire to effect material reforms and to accomplish the abolition of slavery. Such dispositions should be encouraged by the Resident."

An incident in connection with the Raja's death illustrates the masterful and resourceful character of Sankara Variyar. When he fell

* The writer of these letters was a European adventurer residing in British Cochin, named J. W. Harris, who, according to Sankara Variyar, "was in the habit of clandestinely paying occasional visits to His Highness, and assisting him in his English correspondence * * Mr. Harris receives from His Highness a monthly salary of Rs. 120, besides many presents. It is obviously his interest to create disputes and foment discord, or else his occupation would be at end." Harris survived the Raja for over thirty years. He lived a very disreputable life, and gradually sank into extreme indigence. He and his children, born of incest, were saved from starvation by the benevolence of Sankara Variyar's sons.

seriously ill, His Highness, a stanch, not to say a bigotted, Mādhva, was anxious to see his *Guru*, the Swami of the *Sodaya Matt* at Uduppi in South Canara, and obtain absolution for his sins. Solicitous as he was in the then exceptional circumstances to do whatever His Highness required, Sankara Variyar at once sent for the Swami, who came down post haste to Trichur. The Swami, who had a fair knowledge of the contents of the strong room in which the State jewels and other valuables were secured, prescribed as an expiatory act of sufficient merit the gift to himself and his saintly followers of certain gold vessels and ornaments whose descriptions coincided with those of some of the vessels and ornaments which happened to be in the strong room. These were got down with all expedition, and bestowed upon the Swami and his disciples with the elaborate ceremonies and feastings appropriate to the occasion. The Swami however entertained a wholesome fear of the Diwan, being well aware that the latter had little faith in his sacrosanctity, and he therefore

discreetly left the place when the Raja was still alive. But when he reached the palace at Kunnamkulam on his way to Uduppi, he found himself surrounded by a detachment of the Nayar Brigade with instructions not to allow him to leave the place, but at the same time to treat him with every mark of respect and consideration. His Highness having died the next day, Sankara Variyar appeared before the Swami soon after the obsequies were over, paid him a lump sum, and brought back the valuables intact.

After the death of this Raja, Sankara Variyar had a comparatively easy time so far as his relations with the palace were concerned. His Highness was succeeded by his younger brother Raja Virakerala Varma, the first Raja of Cochin who had received an English education. Thirteen months after his accession to the *masnad*, this intelligent, amiable and accomplished Prince went on an extended tour in Upper India, and died at Benares in February 1853 in the prime of his life and after a reign of but twenty months. His younger brother

Raja Ravi Varma succeeded him, but he had neither the high character nor the accomplishments of his predecessor. Both these Princes entertained a great opinion of Sankara Variyar's character and ability, and after their accession to the *masnad*, they treated him with conspicuous favour and regard, and gave him their implicit confidence and uniform support.



CHAPTER VI.

LAST YEARS AND DEATH.

Now is the stately column broke,
The beacon light is quench'd in smoke,
The trumpet's silver sound is still,
The warder silent on the hill.—SCOTT.

In the administration of Sankara Variyar during the three or four years preceding his death there is not much to chronicle, as he did not then display the feverish activity that characterised the first decade of his government. Some of the measures of this period, such as the irrigation project in Chittur Taluk, have already been referred to. The most important of the measures that remain to be mentioned was the abolition of slavery simultaneously in Travancore and Cochin. Slavery prevailed in these States from very early times, and since the time of Colonel Munro, various measures were suggested for the amelioration of the condition of the slaves. The protracted discussion of the measures ended in their total

emancipation in 1854. The number of slaves so emancipated were no fewer than 58,000, of whom 6,500 belonged to the Sirkar and the rest to private owners.

The Madras Government wanted the two States to issue the proclamation of emancipation on the same day, and the Resident accordingly requested the two Diwans to discuss the terms of the proclamation between them, and to come to some agreement. The draft prepared by the Travancore Diwan contained a clause to which Sankara Variyar strongly objected. This clause provided that their emancipation did not authorise the infringement of the standing usages and customs of the different classes. The reference in this curiously worded clause was to the customary pollution by approach. Sankara Variyar argued that this disability was not confined to the slave castes, and that, as it was based on custom and not on law, it was objectionable to make the disability statutory in the case of the slave castes alone. Another clause penalised offences committed by slave castes, but Sankara Variyar

considered this unnecessary, but would penalise offences committed against them. As the two Diwans could not come to an agreement, the Resident allowed each to issue the proclamation in his own way. When copies of the two proclamations and of the correspondence relating thereto went up to the Madras Government in due course with the Resident's political diary, according to the practice then obtaining, they observed—"It is much to be regretted that the Resident had not insisted on the omission of the second clause of the Travancore proclamation as unnecessary, because the introduction of this clause without any apparent reason arising out of that which it professes to qualify leads to the inference that something more is meant than is expressed. For this reason and because there is no such clause in the Cochin proclamation, and it is expedient that the law should be the same in both the States, the Government are of opinion that the Resident might well have required the second clause to be expunged." As regards the fifth clause, the Government observe that "it contrasts

remarkably with the clear and full clause of the Cochin proclamation * * The Government think the words of the Cochin proclamation should be adopted, and they desire that this be done by a fresh proclamation." This was accordingly done.

An incident occurred in 1853, which strained almost to the breaking point Sankara Variyar's relations with General Cullen, which had hitherto been uniformly cordial and friendly. The Konkani or Saraswat Brahmans of Cochin had for long been a wealthy and influential community under the special protection of the Dutch. Though there were Konkans in several places on the sea board of Cochin and Travancore, the town of Native Cochin, which contained their chief temple, was their head quarters. The authority of the Rajas of Cochin over them was but nominal. Raja Rama Varma, who ascended the *masnad* in 1792 and who is known to posterity as *Saktan Tamburan*, had always been jealous of the jurisdiction exercised by the Dutch over the Konkans, and relying on his new alliance

with the English and the growing weakness of the Dutch, he began to set this privilege at nought. He extorted money from those Konkanis who were in affluent circumstances, and put to death those who defied his authority. He then proceeded to take forcible possession of the costly jewels and idols set with precious stones belonging to their temple, the well known Tirumala Devaswom. The *Adhikaris*, or managers, of the temple, however, got timely intimation of the contemplated seizure, and managed to remove the jewels and idols to their temple at Alleppey, which was then a newly constituted port gradually rising to importance. The *Adhikaris* were thereupon apprehended and put to death by His Highness's orders. This was in 1801.

After the second treaty with the English was concluded in 1809, orderly government was established in the State under the direction of the Resident Colonel Munro, when the jurisdiction over the Konkanis was unconditionally vested in the Raja. The Konkanis soon became reconciled to the new arrangement, and have

ever since proved a loyal community. They now wanted the idols back from Alleppey, but the handful of their compatriots there, backed by the Travancore authorities, would not part with them. The plea of the Travancore Government was that the prosperity of the port of Alleppey was bound up with the presence of the idols there and that their removal would affect it adversely. This plea was in all seriousness accepted and constantly reiterated by Colonel Munro, who refused to grant the request of the Cochin Konkanis and their government. The Konkanis, however, continued to agitate the question for the next forty years, sending memorial after memorial to the Resident, to the Madras and Bengal Governments, and to the Court of Directors for the restitution of the idols, but acting on Munro's *arbiter dictum*, they invariably refused this reasonable request. Sankara Variyar found that the British Government would not consider the question on its merits unless they were compelled to do so by some sensational *coup*, and he accordingly advised the

Konkanis to get possession of the idols by any means fair or foul. Early in 1853, a Konkani priest from Cochin went to their Alleppey temple as a devotee, and spent many days and nights there in religious exercises, till he came to be regarded as a venerable saint. One day at midnight he entered the *sanctum sanctorum* with the aid of false keys, took possession of the idols, and hurried to Cochin, where he and his precious burden were welcomed with wild demonstrations of joy and triumph.

General Cullen became wild when he heard of this outrage, and did not care to disguise his opinion that it was done with the connivance of the Cochin authorities. Sankara Variyar pleaded ignorance of the whole transaction, and parried the general's blows with wonderful skill and agility, at the same time setting up the Konkanis to send reasoned memorials to the higher authorities to show that the idols now were where they ought to be. After an animated correspondence extending over three years, the Court of Directors saked the Madras Government "to call upon

the Cochen Sirkar at once to replace the images in the pagodas from which they have been clandestinely removed, informing the Cochin authorities that, after their restitution has been made, you would be prepared to examine and decide to which State the images rightfully belong." This was exactly what Sankara Variyar wanted. He now advised the Konkanis to restore the images, and promised to get them back for them in a few months. But the Konkanis did not take the advice in good part, and refused to part with the idols, and before Sankara Variyar was able to prevail upon them to be guided by his advice, he was laid low by a mortal malady. It need only to be added, therefore, that the Konkanis gave up the idols only after the Resident made a military demonstration, that subsequently the question was placed before the Madras Government in its proper light, and that, after considering it on its merits, they decided that the idols should be restored to Cochin by Travancore, which was accordingly done in February 1859.

Sankara Variyar had a robust constitution,

but seventeen years of strenuous and sustained work and occasional neglect of health undermined that constitution. He had for some time been suffering from diabetes, which was complicated by the malaria he contracted in 1853 while camping for days together in the eastern villages of the Chittur Taluk in connection with the execution of irrigation works and the assessment of lands newly brought under cultivation. Early in October 1856, a swelling appeared near the right ear, accompanied by fever, and he gradually became worse. Hearing of the seriousness of the case, His Highness the Raja did him unprecedented honour of a personal visit on the 13th, and the Raja of Cranganur visited him the next day. "The Diwan still continues to do his office work," laments his younger son Govinda Menon, "and that makes him worse. On the 11th the Diwan wrote to the Resident to send down the Diwan Peishkar to assist him in carrying on business. I discontinued going to office on account of Diwan's illness." 17th—"Diwan had papers read to him, and passed orders on

them, and with difficulty put his initials to them." On the same day his eldest son Sankunni Menon, who was then the Munsiff of Veliyangod, arrived at Ernakulam. The following extracts from his diary pathetically describes the last days:—

"Reached Ernakulam at 5 P. M. Mr. Gunther (the Diwan's medical attendant), whom I met at the landing place, gave a vague reply when I asked whether the Diwan was in a dangerous state. Saw D. at 7 P. M. He was weak indeed! A severe pain all over the body, and he could not move without assistance. 18th—I heard at Karupadanna that the boil had burst and that D. was getting better, and was in high spirits, but when I saw the boil, and Dr. Pringle told me that D. was in a precarious state, I was nearly crying * * 19th—At noon, alarming symptoms. A kind of lethargy and speaking incoherently. But this does not prevent his insisting upon reading over the Resident's answer to his request that the Peishkar might be sent down * * At night, when D. became worse and was rambling, he

threatened the Konkani with punishment, quoting the Regulations. Said that they would bring dishonour on themselves and discredit on the Sirkar by persisting, but, if they consented, he would get it back in four months for them * * In the evening D. was sometimes collected enough, and appeared to be aware of his approaching end. Said what is decreed by God will come to pass, that Mala Kaniyan, an astrologer, had foretold that, when the planets were in their present position, the Diwan would meet his death, and as his calculations were seldom wrong, it would come to pass. *20th*—D. has become weaker, if possible. The difficulty of breathing has considerably increased, and we can scarcely make out the words he sometimes utters, so feeble they were * * Mr. Cullen has granted his court servants leave to come and see him, and thousands have gathered round the house compound, hearing that their favourite Diwan was on his deathbed. Our throats were all choking, and I could not look at my eldest boy without crying, for he had known no father except his grand papa. At

midnight we were called up to witness his exit, which took place at about one in the morning. There was not the slightest change in the expression of his countenance. All appeared overwhelmed with grief."

Sankara Variyar's death evoked remarkable demonstrations of grief, respect and admiration. It is no exaggeration to say that the people of Cochin were stunned by the news. He filled such a large space in their eyes for nearly a generation, and brought the State to such an enviable position that their grief can well be imagined. His body was followed to the cremation ground by a concourse of weeping people of all classes numbering many thousands. When the news of his death was conveyed to the Raja, His Highness at once ordered that the funeral should be conducted with military honours and that all the heavy expenses connected with the subsequent ceremonies should be defrayed from the public treasury. The Resident expressed his "perfect concurrence in this mark of respect paid by His Highness the Raja to the memory of His Highness's late

most meritorious and valuable Diwan." The Government of Madras issued a special order to express their profound regret at the loss sustained by the Cochin Sirkar, while the Collector of Malabar deplored the loss of "that most sagacious and accurate officer, the late Diwan Sankara Variyar." It is significant of the respect in which he was held by the European officers in the neighbouring District of Malabar that, in the condolence letter he sent at this time, Mr. Robinson the Collector offered to make Sankara Variyar's second son Govinda Menon a Tahsildar and, in that sent by Mr. Cook the Civil Judge, he offered him the Sheristadarship of his Court. *

* Govinda Menon notes in his diary—"My father's death is as universally regretted as he was loved in his life time." The simplicity of this entry is only equalled by its truth.

CHAPTER VII. CHARACTERISTICS.

He is possessed by a commanding spirit,
And his too is the station of command;
And well for us it is so. COLERIDGE.

Sankara Variyar was a man of medium height, brown-complexioned, robustly-built, broad-shouldered and somewhat rugged-featured. He had a broad face, with a square jaw, firm lips, a prominent nose, an intellectual forehead, and bright, penetrating eyes. On the rare occasions on which he was provoked to anger, his eyes flashed fire, before which recalcitrant subordinates and evil-doing characters visibly quailed. Though not particularly handsome and never richly clad, he was a singularly impressive looking man. He had, in fact, the look of a born leader of men, with a natural genius of command. Men obeyed him as if by instinct, as if because they had no power to disobey. He was far from being a cruel, or even a severe, man, and yet his subordinates carried out his orders with the utmost

promptitude, as if their lives depended upon their obedience. His masterful character might, have made some people fret, and some of his actions might have caused grumbling in others, but his splendid successes as an administrator and his innate nobility of character almost hushed criticism. If a few people here and there spoke in his disfavour, they did so with bated breath and in whispering humbleness.

Sankara Variyar was a man of proved courage. He was born and bred up at a time when, under the ægis of British suzerainty, the emasculation of the martial races on this coast had not reached the stage that it now has. He showed one form of courage when he unhesitatingly declined the Diwanship of Cochin, the object of his live-long ambition, and again the Diwanship of Travancore, and when he serenely carried on his successful administration under circumstances of exceptional difficulty and annoyance. He displayed another form of courage in his encounters with organised bands of armed smugglers and highway men. Entries like "The Diwan captured two boats of

smuggled pepper last night at great risk" are of frequent occurrence in his son's diaries. Such of his well-wishers as could take the liberty to do so used to remonstrate with him for what they looked upon as his recklessness, but he merely smiled, and said that it was all the day's work.

He had in a conspicuous degree the faculty of choosing his subordinates well and wisely. He knew men, and he selected each subordinate for the work which he could best perform, and consequently he was, even in that age of low official morality, wonderfully well served. He was discriminatingly considerate to his subordinates, and seldom failed to reward those who did their work to his satisfaction. He constantly toured in the State, and visited every nook and corner of it. He had thus a personal knowledge of the character of all his local officers, a fact which the latter seldom failed to bear in mind. He had a band of able and zealous local officers whose names are still remembered in Cochin. Of three of these especially, Sankara Variyar had the highest opinion, and he looked upon them as his right

hand men. They were Scipio Vernede; Kurupat Krishna Menon and Palliyil Nanu Menon. Throughout Sankara Variyar's administration Mr. Vernede held the office of Commercial Agent, with charge of the English correspondence of the Diwan, an office to which he was appointed on Sankara Variyar's recommendation by his predecessor. Though born in Cochin, he was educated at Cambridge; he was a well-read man, and wielded a facile pen. His advice and assistance were of great value to Sankara Variyar, and he enjoyed the latter's confidence and esteem in ample measure. Of all his officers, Krishna Menon most resembled Sankara Variyar in character and ability. He was the Tahsildar of Trichur, but his ability and energy were such that his services were in constant requisition in other Taluks, whenever, anything of exceptional difficulty and importance had to be done. Sankara Variyar, who found him "a most zealous, upright and intelligent officer", wanted to make him his Diwan Peishkar, but the opposition of the Raja and the man's untimely death prevented

him from giving effect to his wishes*. Nanu Menon was Sankara Variyar's earliest friend, and was appointed Tahsildar on the latter's elevation to the Diwanship. He was a man of great ability and probity, and of all his contemporaries he was considered the greatest master of the complicated system of revenue and accounts then prevailing in Cochin†.

Though he was at times somewhat irregular in his personal habits, Sankara Variyar was very regular and systematic in all that pertained to his official duties. He spent the morning hours in giving audience to his officers and others, or in making local inspections, especially when in camp. An hour or two after breakfast, as also after supper, were his

* There is no doubt of the efficiency of the Tahsildar of Trichur", says General Cullen. "He is a most intelligent and active servant**Is there no way of providing a more extensive charge to him and in a way suited to his peculiar qualifications"? According to Govinda Menon, "a more independent, painstaking, zealous public servant is seldom met with. He was the only one of the Tahsildars who professed liberal sentiments, and was fit for higher offices".

† Govinda Menon says:— "The year 1853 is gone, and with it many a good man, among others His Highness the Maharaja of Cochin, Paliyat Valiya Achan Avargal and Palliyil Nanu Menon".

periods of relaxation, which he spent in the society of congenial souls, and when all official talk was taboo. After a short nap, he attended to the day's tapal, which was opened in his presence by two clerks. Each report or petition, as it was opened, was read out to him, and he passed orders then and there. In cases in which a reference to previous records was necessary, the head of the branch concerned was to attend upon him with the necessary references the same evening or the next day at the latest. Such cases, however, were not many owing to his wonderful memory and his extensive and minute knowledge of Cochin and its affairs. He attended office at three, and devoted an hour or two to his magisterial work and to receiving petitions, after which he signed the orders of the day, and interviewed the heads of departments in his office. He seldom left office before seven, and sometimes remained there as late as nine. He never allowed the work of his office to get into arrears, more especially in the department of accounts. The system of accounts then in vogue was a system

of advances, and Sankara Variyar insisted on all such advances being adjusted before the close of the year.

Sankara Variyar spent as much time in camp as at head quarters. His itinerary never got into a groove: he went to all places where his presence was necessary. He constantly inspected all the public works in progress, personally supervised the assessment of lands newly brought under cultivation, and made local inspections for the settlement of disputes between parties. He had thus visited every inch of Cochin territory, had personal knowledge of the requirements of every locality, and was acquainted with the circumstances of all important and many unimportant families in the State. All this knowledge he turned to the best account in the interest of the people. Go to any corner of Cochin you will, you are sure to hear from old inhabitants of something Sankara Variyar had done for that locality.

In many ways Sankara Variyar was considerably in advance of his times. That his views of government and his conduct as a

responsible officer were so has, I hope, been made abundantly clear in the foregoing pages. That he took to the study of English in middle age at a time when no one thought of giving even their children an English education points in the same direction. In social matters the liberalism of his views was even more remarkable. We have seen what far-sighted view he took of the pollution disability of emancipated slaves. He was in his time and for many years afterwards the only caste Hindu in Cochin, who did not believe in the sanctity of the custom enjoining pollution by touch and by approach. He did not however parade his views, lest they might wound the susceptibilities of his friends and relatives; but those who were intimately associated with him were well aware of his disregard for the custom. His orthodox admirers had only one fault to find with him. They wondered more in sorrow than in anger how a religious and god-fearing man like their idol could have burdened his soul with the sin of violating the divinely ordained law of pollution by contact and by propinquity.

In his official relations Sankara Variyar was somewhat inclined to put on an appearance of gravity and, at times, even of severity. But in private life he was a very genial man, full of the joy of living and fond of the society of his fellow-men. The society that he enjoyed most was that of authors and of men of wit and learning. Such men were always welcomed by him, and a few of them were always to be found in his entourage. Blessed as he was with a keen sense of humour, he delighted in their piquant conversation, their smart repartees, in their genial cut-and-thrust of personal banter, and in the improvised verses in which some of them good-humouredly caricatured the men and events of his time. Besides the encouragement and support he gave to these people, he rendered valuable help to European scholars like Rev. Bailey and others in their praiseworthy industry in compiling Malayalam dictionaries and grammars, which have since given such an impetus to the critical study of the language. His sense of humour sometimes led Sankara Variyar to pass

very unconventional orders on official papers to the confusion of his clerks. To give only one example: An overweening and quarrelsome young scion of an aristocratic family once picked a quarrel with a subordinate officer in his locality, and reported him to the Diwan. The latter knew all about the quarrel before the receipt of the petition; he was well aware that it was entirely due to the pugnacious character of the petitioner. He endorsed on the petition a well known Sanskrit verse*, which may be freely translated thus:—"Youth, great wealth, aristocratic pride, want of discretion: any one of these is enough for one's undoing; what then, if all these are combined in one?"

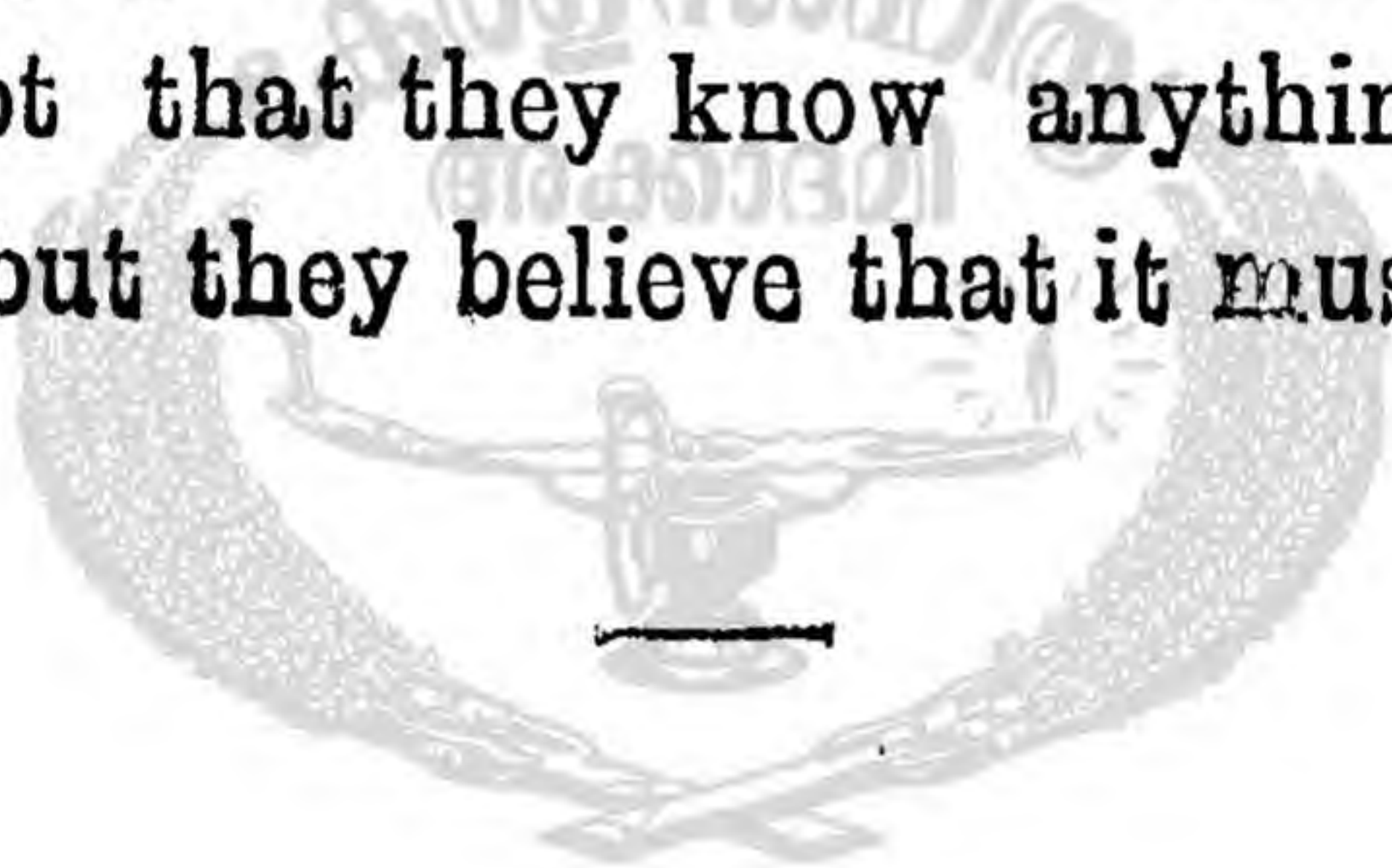
Sankara Variyar had no false pride, and never put on airs. Ostentatious display of all kinds was repugnant to his soul. He moved about the State like a simple citizen and without any of the pomp of office. Sychophants and flatterers he snubbed mercilessly. He never

* Youvanam dhana-sampattih prabhutvâma vivêk itâ
Ekaikamapyanarhâya kimutatra chatushtayam.

accepted any honour to which he was not legitimately entitled. To one Kasinatha Mudaliar of Madras, who was a contractor in his time, Sankara Variyar once wrote--"The title of your Excellency I wish you to avoid in your future communications, as I am not entitled to it." Some of his successors would have escaped much ridicule, if they had followed this example. Sankara Variyar was always open to conviction: no false notions of dignity deterred him from adopting the views of his subordinates in preference to his own, if he was once satisfied that they were right. But he allowed no one to take liberties with him, nor did he suffer fools gladly.

Such was Sankara Variyar as a man and as Diwan. The reputation he enjoyed and still enjoys in Cochin is altogether unique. For nearly two decades, his personality pervaded the State as an invigorating element. His beneficent activities were exercised not merely through the ordinary official channels, but also in a variety of other ways. Many a quarrel in respectable families, the ruin of many an old

aristocratic family by the extravagance or imbecility of its managing member, the mismanagement of many a religious endowment, Hindu or Chirstain, many a ruinous litigation were averted by what General Cullen called "his powerful and unique personal influence in the country." His hand was seen and his presence felt everywhere, so much so that ordinary folk have come to associate with his name with everything good in the administration of the State: not that they know anything definite about it, but they believe that it must be so.



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